

# HAVING EFFECTIVE GOTV CONVERSATIONS



## 1. OVERVIEW



## 2. PRINCIPLES OF GOTV CONVERSATIONS



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## OVERVIEW

Turning out voters is part art, part science. But it's mostly science. Conversations with voters in the final stretch can win elections, though it's important to remember that, in most cases, we are talking about moving a few percentage points of the overall vote share. [Political scientists have been studying different turnout messages and interventions for decades](#), most recently in the form of large field experiments or randomized controlled trials (RCTs). And while no magic message has been discovered, conversations at the door and on the phone have proven to be [two of the most effective ways of turning out voters](#), and there are [a handful of conversation approaches that we know to be effective](#).

We've also learned a lot about what doesn't work, and sometimes it's counterintuitive. For example, simple reminder conversations with voters have been shown to have no impact. While it's important to share information on polling location and hours, it's even more important to have a quality conversation that nudges voters to act on their good intentions. We've laid out some key principles below. We hope you will incorporate these into your GOTV scripts, and share them with organizers and volunteers.

## KEY PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE GOTV CONVERSATIONS

### 1. Commit to vote

Studies have shown that verbalizing a commitment or pledge to take an action makes people more likely to follow up and actually do the thing. [Turns out this applies to voting!](#) Rock the Vote [first tested this out in 1996](#). They had voters fill out pledge cards, cite the reasons why they planned to vote, and then mailed the cards back out to voters to remind them of their pledge just before Election Day. [This has since become common practice](#).

You can incorporate a commit-to-vote practice—or, better yet, commit-to-early-vote in your voter contact programs by:

- Asking voters to “take a pledge to vote” (at the door/on the phones)
- Having your canvassers carry pledge cards (and mailing them back to voters before E-Day or when early vote starts)
- Asking your volunteers to collect cell phone numbers so that they can call or text to remind voters of their vote pledges during GOTV

### 2. Make a plan

Helping voters to make voting plans is [one of the most effective things you can do to turn them out to the polls](#). And this is fairly intuitive. Have you ever gone on a diet or committed yourself to a new exercise regimen? People are more successful at following through when they plan their meals ahead of time, and schedule their workouts for the week.

[The same logic applies to following through on an intention to vote](#). People are more likely to actually show up to the polls if they have gone through a thought process or visualization of what time they'll go and how they'll get there. So, we suggest incorporating this in your GOTV scripts for door and phone conversations. Note: it's important to know that plan-making seems to work in human-to-human interaction, but [has not worked via text messages from senders with whom voters did not have a pre-existing relationship](#).

Here are a few questions you might add to your GOTV scripts to prompt supporters to make a voting plan:

- “Will you vote by mail, early, or on Election Day?”
- “Do you know which day you plan to go to the polls?”
- “Will you go before work, after work, or on a lunch break?”
- “And have you thought about how you'll get there? Do you need transportation?”
- “Will you need childcare while you go vote? Do you plan to take your kids with you?”

### **3. Apply positive social pressure**

Voters are humans, and [humans are relational creatures](#). Thus, social pressure is a powerful tool. And [it's been shown to have a tremendous effect on voters](#). The challenge for campaigns is to help apply that pressure, but gently, without shaming voters. We encourage you to let supporters know that their voting record is public (but their ballot is secret), and to imply that people might be paying attention to whether or not they vote. Mentioning their neighbors, framing voting as an important civic duty, and saying that you may call to follow up with them after the election are all approaches that have been taken by campaigns in recent cycles.

Here is sample language you might incorporate into your GOTV conversations:

- “We can see from public records that you are an active voter.”
- “Just so you know, whether or not you vote is public record, but who you vote for is secret.”
- “We may follow up with you after the election to debrief your voting experience.”
- “Can your neighbors count on you to join them in voting this year?”

#### 4. Emphasize voting as a social norm

Voters are more likely to cast their ballots [if they think everybody's doing it](#). It might be counterintuitive, but emphasizing high turnout has a positive effect on voters. So you should avoid talking about historical turnout rates (unless they are high in your district or state), and instead emphasize that voting is the norm and that turnout this year is particularly high.

You don't need to be too heavy-handed here. We like the following phrases:

- “We're expecting high turnout, but it will be a tight race, so your vote counts.”
- “We've spoken to lots of your neighbors who have told us they'll be voting.”

#### 5. Make it personal

If you've been following the trends this year, you may have heard the term “Relational Organizing.” [Relational organizing is a just fancy word for good organizing if you ask us](#), but it's based on the idea that engaging with and making asks of people you know (friends, family, colleagues) has a bigger effect than engaging with and making asks of people you don't know. We've seen [personalization](#) and relational context make a difference [when it comes to activating volunteers](#) and turning people out to events. And [technologists are now equipping campaigns with valuable new tools](#) to scale personal engagement via texting, email, and social media.

We recommend that you keep this fundamental principle in mind—people are more likely to take action if they feel a personal connection. Encourage your volunteers to reach out to their friends, colleagues, and family members about voting, and train them to establish a personal connection when they speak to voters.

This can be as simple as beginning each conversation with an introduction that establishes that the canvasser or caller is a volunteer from the voter's neighborhood. That might sound something like this: “Hi, this is Laura! I'm one of your neighbors in [city/neighborhood], and I'm calling from the campaign office over on [street name].”

For more on what we are learning about the effects of relational organizing (and turning out voters generally), you can check out and apply for membership with [Analyst Institute](#), a research hub for social justice organizations and progressive campaigns.